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Draft report

Addendum

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Programme questions: evaluation (4 (c))

Triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its thirty-sixth session on the evaluation of the Department of Public Information

1. At its 4th meeting, on 8 June 1999, the Committee considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its thirty-sixth session on the evaluation of the Department of Public Information, transmitted under cover of a note by the Secretary-General (E/AC.51/1999/4).

2. The representative of the Secretary-General introduced the report and responded to questions raised during the Committee's consideration of the report.

Discussion

3. The Committee noted the efforts and progress of the Department of Public Information in implementing a number of recommendations made by the Committee three years previously. The view was expressed, however, that progress on many aspects of the work of the Department on which recommendations had been made was slow. It was noted that, during the past three years, public information activities had gone through a reorientation, and that more time was needed to assess the results of that reorientation.

4. Concern was expressed that the inadequacy of resources was the cause of a number of difficulties faced by the Department in implementing its activities, as identified in the report under consideration. In particular, it was noted that, because of the reduction in resources, many United Nations information centres could not play a meaningful role. The

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view was expressed that the report should have offered suggestions for remedial action in its conclusions and recommendations. Several representatives expressed the view that triennial reviews of the implementation of earlier recommendations of the Committee should adequately reflect new concerns due to new trends and developments that had arisen in the intervening three years.

5. On the overall strategy of the Department, and in respect to the work of its Strategic Communications Planning Group, it was stressed that the information goals and priorities the Department should follow were those enunciated by the General Assembly. The view was expressed that the coordination of the public information activities of the Secretariat needed to be improved, and that the Department should maintain more sustained contacts with other departments.

6. Support was expressed for innovations, such as those of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. Use made by the Department of the Internet and the opportunities it offered for dissemination of information was welcomed. It was noted, however, that traditional media, such as printed material, should not be neglected as access to new technologies was not yet universal.

7. The efforts of the Department to pursue a more active way of using traditional media were noted. In particular, the continuing quality of *Africa Recovery* was commended. The view was expressed that the publication, with its well-defined target audience, offered a model for other departmental publications. Regarding radio broadcasting, it was noted that the development of a United Nations radio broadcasting capacity would necessitate funding. The representative of the Secretariat informed the Committee that funds were not currently available, in the regular budget or through extrabudgetary resources, and that the Department was approaching Member States for this purpose.

8. The Committee attaches importance to transparency and it expressed the view that ways should be found to facilitate access to United Nations officials by media organizations. In this respect, the Committee noted that the recommended Secretary-General's bulletin on disclosure of information had not yet been issued. It was stressed that the newly issued guidelines on disclosure of information should be specific and clear. Their implementation should not add a new layer of bureaucracy in the Secretariat.

9. It was observed that the timely issuance of information was a key question. It was noted that the development of a more effective news-gathering and delivery system was a positive step. Regret was expressed that existing practices impeding access by the visual media to activities of the United Nations had not been reviewed.

10. On the integration of information centres with the offices of resident coordinators, the risk of imposing an additional burden on resident coordinators and, as a result, compromising the effectiveness of information activities caused concern. Such integration should be done on a case-by-case basis. The view was also expressed that in selecting resident coordinators the additional role should be considered.

11. The Committee noted the efforts by the Publications Board with regard to the adoption of a policy requiring departments to establish mechanisms to enhance the quality of their publications. It was noted that, although quality control was still a concern, the Board had not considered a centralized policy of peer review to be feasible. Action by the Publications Board on a policy to monitor the quality of publications was seen as desirable, bearing in mind that the Board should facilitate the work of departments, and should not make their tasks more complicated, as recommended by the Committee at its thirty-eighth session.

Conclusions and recommendations

12. The Committee commended the report and the monitoring and follow-up activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services that went into its preparation. The Committee was of the view that the report gave an accurate description of the uneven implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee at its thirty-sixth session, and of the difficulties encountered by the Department, and had identified areas where progress was still needed.

13. The Committee stressed the importance it attached to the work of the Department of Public Information and the role it could play in presenting a positive image of the United Nations to the public.

14. The Committee recommended that recommendation 1 be implemented in full conformity with rule 101.2 (p) of the Staff Regulations and Rules.

15. The Committee endorsed recommendation 2, on the understanding that the quality of publications should continue to be improved, and that in this regard recommendation 2 should facilitate rather than control the publications.

16. The author departments must take primary responsibility for their outputs vis-à-vis substance, cost-effectiveness and relevance to mandates and should exercise that responsibility in accordance with the policy to be adopted by the Publications Board and in a way which ensured systematic quality control.

17. The Committee noted the importance of information centres and recommended that all efforts be made to ensure that the centres would play a meaningful communications role.

18. The Committee emphasized that programmes should be evaluated with a view to ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the programmes and legislative mandates of the Organization. Analytical and critical evaluations of the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates should be carried out, examining whether changes therein required review of the methods of delivery, the continuing relevance of administrative procedures and whether the activities corresponded to the mandates as they might be reflected in the approved budgets and the medium-term plan. The recommendations in the evaluation studies should be strictly in accordance with the approved legislative mandates and regulations and rules of the Organization.

19. The Committee recognized the importance of publications in promoting the image of the United Nations and their usefulness for Member States and the public.

20. The Committee noted that the evaluation report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, together with the recommendations of the Committee thereon, had not been submitted to the Committee on Information as had been recommended.